

## A Teacher's Pedagogical Belief in Teaching Grammar: A Case Study

Nurdiyana Mohamad Yusof, Geethanjali Narayanan, Marina Arif

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v9-i13/6251> DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v9-i13/6251

**Received:** 11 March 2019, **Revised:** 10 June 2019, **Accepted:** 22 July 2019

**Published Online:** 29 August 2019

**In-Text Citation:** (Yusof, Narayanan, & Arif, 2019)

**To Cite this Article:** Yusof, N. M., Narayanan, G., & Arif, M. (2019). A Teacher's Pedagogical Belief in Teaching Grammar: A Case Study. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9(13), 157–165.

**Copyright:** © 2019 The Author(s)

Published by Human Resource Management Academic Research Society ([www.hrmars.com](http://www.hrmars.com))

This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at: <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode>

**Special Issue: Revolutionizing Education: Challenges, Innovation, Collaboration, 2019, Pg. 157 - 165**

<http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/IJARBSS>

**JOURNAL HOMEPAGE**

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at  
<http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/publication-ethics>

## A Teacher's Pedagogical Belief in Teaching Grammar: A Case Study

Nurdiyana Mohamad Yusof<sup>1</sup>, Geethanjali Narayanan<sup>2</sup>, Marina Arif<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, Universiti Selangor, Unisel Bestari Jaya Campus, 45600  
Bestari Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: diyana@unisel.edu.my

<sup>2,3</sup> Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, UiTM Puncak Alam Campus, 42300 Puncak  
Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: geetha@salam.uitm.edu.my, marina363@salam.uitm.edu.my

**Abstract:** The study was conducted to investigate the teacher's pedagogical belief in teaching grammar whether it should be taught explicitly or implicitly. The objectives of the study were to identify the teacher's own pedagogical belief when teaching grammar, to investigate the reasons for the teacher's choice of belief in teaching grammar and finally to find out the challenges faced by the teacher in implementing her selected belief. A practicum mentor at a public secondary school in Klang was selected as the participant of the study. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyze the data collected and to look at the pattern of the teacher's pedagogical belief in teaching grammar whether explicitly or implicitly. Data from the study revealed that the participant's pedagogical belief is fluid and it changes depending on the students' competence level in English and the environment of the classes. Nevertheless, this fluidity in the respondent's belief is also constantly being influenced by her own experiences in learning grammar during her schooling years and the pressure of finishing the mandated English syllabus with very limited time.

**Keywords:** Explicit Teaching, Implicit Teaching, Teacher's Pedagogical Beliefs, Teaching of Grammar

### Introduction

The endless argument on the best approach to teach grammar has significant effects on the development of the practice of language teaching. Consequently, various methodologies have been developed for teachers in order to align with teaching styles and the students' capabilities. However, due to the lack of specific guidelines on grammar teaching has caused teachers to create their own beliefs on how to teach grammar in the classroom. (Borg, 1998; 2003). This has resulted in several issues. The first one is "how teachers teach grammar in the classrooms in ways which avoid formalism without losing sight of the fact that grammar is systematically organized" (Carter 1990, p. 117). Next is on the effort of the teachers in deciding and finding ways in teaching and making the implicit

knowledge into explicit (Carter 1990). The last issue is the ways teachers cope between the specifications in grammar in a language syllabus with the acquisition of the language (Rutherford 1987). Grammatical components are typically being cautiously chosen and reflected in a linear process that displays the lessons that are going to be taught. However, the acquisition of the language is a cyclic process (Rutherford 1987). The stages and time for each learner to acquire certain aspect of grammatical concept differ with the personality and maturity of a person. Due to these contradicting opinions on the importance of grammar in language teaching and the process of acquiring knowledge about grammar, various methodologies of teaching grammar have emerged.

As new approaches and methods exist, individuals who implement such approaches have their own beliefs and views about the chosen approach, particularly teachers. Nespor (1987) mentioned that teachers will depend on their beliefs when they need to tackle with “ill-defined and deeply entangled situations” (p. 324) in the schools. Teachers can be classified into two groups with different outlook of grammar within the Communicative approach (Howatt and Widdowson, 2004). One of the groups deemed that implicit grammar teaching will help students to develop their grammatical competence as they are being exposed to the input from the environment. The other group considers that in order to let the students really understand the functions of grammar, explicit instruction must be implemented.

This research investigated a teacher’s pedagogical belief in teaching grammar whether it should be taught explicitly or implicitly. In addition, the study also looked at the factors that affect the teacher’s choice of such belief. These personal theories become the root for the teacher’s personal knowledge about teaching and hence, as mentioned by many researchers, will have a foremost influence in their instructional practices.

### **Teacher’s Pedagogical Belief in Teaching Grammar**

Tillema (2000) had mentioned that teachers’ beliefs can greatly impact on their decisions and judgements in the classroom. Eisenhart et al. (1988) had defined teachers’ beliefs and practices as an attitude consistently applied to an activity that guides both our thoughts and behaviours. However, teachers’ beliefs are not directly observable, so they are not easy to study (Johnson, 1994). Research in English language teaching in the last 15 years has provided much evidence of the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices. While beliefs clearly do influence what teachers do, teachers’ instructional decisions do not always reflect their beliefs (Borg, 2006). Furthermore, beliefs form a structured set of principles that are derived from school practices, a teacher’s prior experiences, and a teacher’s individual personality. Thus, there is an increase in the realization of the need to understand the underlying belief systems of language teachers and the impact these have on their classroom practices (Borg, 2003). Understanding the teachers’ beliefs is also being considered as essential in improving teaching practices and teacher education programs (Johnson, 1994). Hence, it is proven that teachers’ beliefs are closely related to their teaching practices and that their choices of beliefs will impact their instructions.

Previous work on attitudes and perceptions within language learning suggests that there is often a disparity between students and teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Spratt, 1999). Such mismatches are often found revolving in the area of grammar teaching. However, despite this lack of correspondence between the teachers’ and students’ views, the past researches also suggested that teachers may take learners’ preferences into account in their decision making around grammar

teaching (Borg, 1998; Macrory, 2000). One of the reasons for this appears to be that the insertion of explicit grammar teaching fulfils several classroom management needs. These include attending to students' concerns on their lack of grammar mastery which is one of the factors in contributing to the pace of lessons and making fluency work more relevant to students (Borg, 1998). These sorts of issues impacted teachers in influencing their decisions, despite their personal reservations about the pedagogical effectiveness of such grammatical treatment. In fact, Borg (1998) indicated the complexity of the decision-making process for pedagogical grammar. He shows how conflicts occur between teacher cognitions in different areas such as the language, language learning, L2 learning, grammar teaching, students and teacher's self.

### **Implicit and Explicit Teaching**

Implicit techniques tend to adapt a naturalistic approach to language acquisition and rely to a greater degree on associative forms of learning (DeKeyser, 2005). The explicit approaches consist of a wide-range of methods but still have the emphasis on raising-awareness of some grammatical feature, typically involving some form of rule-learning (Ellis 2006). Proponents of the naturalistic teaching methods, such as Krashen (1992), are the most critical of explicit language teaching. According to his input hypothesis, explicit teaching methods can never lead to the acquisition of implicit knowledge and thus, would not help the learner in achieving second language proficiency. He argues that implicit knowledge can be acquired through adequate exposure and comprehension of the target language without any conscious effort being made to acquire an explicit understanding of the grammar.

The most vital point is that explicit knowledge functions must be seen as an awareness-raising device. It grabs the learner's attention to non-significant linguistic forms, which they might not give any attention to before, and turning it into more noticeable (Ellis 2010). This is related to Schmidt's (1993) 'Noticing the gap' hypothesis, in which heightened awareness of the grammatical feature will trigger the learner in comparing their own inter-language, such as their cognitive representation of the L2, with the target language itself. Explicit understanding may therefore be used by the learner in order to accelerate his implicit learning. According to this view, implicit and explicit knowledge are considered as opposite ends of a same field and therefore explicit knowledge may be transformed and changed anytime to implicit knowledge through a process of automatization given sufficient practice.

This belief is the base of the traditional classroom approach of Present-Practice-Produce (PPP) that assumes declarative knowledge can be converted into procedural knowledge by a process of *proceduralisation* (DeKeyser, 1998). From this perspective, some have argued that rather than try to teach implicit knowledge directly, it is better to present the learner with explicit knowledge in order to equip them with the means to practice the language. In doing so, explicit knowledge can be converted into implicit by a process of *proceduralisation*. Therefore, regardless of the conflicts between explicit and implicit teaching of grammar made by the past researchers, it must be understood that each of the approaches has its own strengths and drawbacks, and teachers will have their own justifications in the preferred choice of teaching. Both of the teachings can be used in enhancing the students' understanding of the content and it depends on the teacher to choose which technique that best suits their beliefs and could cater to the students' needs as well.

## Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used to collect the data of the study. An in-depth interview was conducted to investigate the respondent's pedagogical beliefs in teaching grammar and to explore factors that shape her pedagogical beliefs. The respondent selected was one of the upper secondary English teachers in Klang area with a minimum number of five years' service. The respondent was selected based on purposive sampling method, where the respondent was classified prior to the research as having the specific characteristics in relation to the research topic (Merriam 2009). The data collected from the interview was analyzed using a framework guided by Seidel (1998) of "noticing, collecting and thinking.". The research used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith 1995 as cited in Bell 2014) that consisted of the super ordinate and subordinate level of categories in classifying the data collected. The super ordinate category is a general grouping of patterns analyzed within the response of the respondent, while the subordinate category will explain the patterns in a detailed manner and the researcher will get a clearer view on the teacher's pedagogical belief in teaching grammar. Jonathan Smith (Smith, Harré and Van Langenhove 1995) has specifically developed this method as to "allow rigorous exploration of idiographic subjective experiences and more specifically, social cognitions" (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008, p. 215). By using super ordinate and subordinate categories in the analysis, it allows for better interpretation of the patterns of responses from the respondent. This subsequently leads to a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

## Results and Discussions

Findings of this study revealed that the teacher applied an explicit method in the teaching of grammar and the factors affecting her belief are divided into three main categories.

### Drilling Method

'Drilling method' was often being referred to during the interview and it is one of the superordinate categories in the findings. The respondent mentioned students' lack of knowledge in grammar as one of the reasons drilling method is practiced in teaching and learning. These can be seen from a few excerpts of the teacher's response;

*"The reason I drill students is because I want them to know how English sentences are formed. You must have subject, noun, verb to be, complement sentences. That is why I'm drilling them. As to differentiate how to use singular and plural, that is also the reason why I use drill."*

*"I mean students nowadays, somehow they tend to be spoon-fed, no matter whether they are in good classes or mediocre, even the weak classes, if we drill them, we can at least help them to identify the sentences, the language, these kinds of words exist, how to use this singular and plural, I mean drilling is helpful"*

Besides being the catalyst in helping the students to learn grammar, the respondent did mention that drilling, although considered as a traditional way of teaching, is agreed as an effective approach by most experienced teachers. This factor leads to another subordinate category which is



the influence of the teacher's own previous learning experience towards her method in teaching grammar. The respondent was taught grammar using the drilling approach in her primary and secondary education. In an excerpt from the interview, the respondent said;

*"Somehow yes, how I learnt grammar, and if let say that kind of learning works for me when I was in primary or secondary school then I will apply them to my students. Previous years during 80s, 90s, the English teachers they used to drill students. That is how I learnt and maybe somehow it does influence me in my teaching"*

This feedback corresponds with Ng and Farell (2003) who found that how and what teachers implemented in the lessons are reigned by their personal beliefs. Additionally, Farell and Lim (2005) also revealed that teacher's beliefs in teaching grammar originated from their own successful experience in learning grammar through drilling method as conducted by their English teachers. Hence, this finding further elucidates that the traditional method molds the teacher's current belief in teaching grammar as the effectiveness of the method is proven and thus, influencing the teacher to use similar approach with the students.

### **Time Constraints**

Time constraints is another important factor influencing the teacher's pedagogical belief in teaching grammar. The respondent felt that she was unable to teach grammar implicitly and creatively due to time constraints.

*"Somehow grammar lesson is only for 40 minutes so we cannot do much because I have to wait for the students to enter the class and wait for them to be prepared and I cannot simply teach when they are not ready."*

The environment also played a role in minimizing the teaching time and this leads to insufficient time for meaningful learning. The implementation of student-centered activities and games during lessons could not be applied regularly as those activities were too time consuming and could not be used in all lessons.

*"For example what we have recently, the PPD came to us and gave us a few ways of teaching which are interesting but you cannot apply those kinds of activities in all classes because it takes time. It is like exchanging information but it is time consuming, so you cannot use it in all lessons. There are a few activities that are fun too. But basically you cannot use all in the lessons."*

Nonetheless, the teacher is unable to fully utilize the teaching aids and games during her lessons as time constraints is hindering her aim in teaching, despite the fact that students are indeed interested with the materials and activities. Similar case was described in the study by Farrell and Lim (2005) that stated teachers would go for the deductive approach in teaching grammar as its direct nature demands a lesser amount of time to carry out. As time constraints is hampering teacher's ability to produce meaningful teaching materials, the respondent applied different techniques while

teaching the different levels of students. It is said by the respondent that students from the good classes would get the extra benefit of learning both explicitly and implicitly as they were more capable of acknowledging both methods.

However, the mediocre or weak classes were more prone to drilling method and not much of implicit learning could be conducted by the teacher. In relation to the 'time constraints' category, such techniques of explicit and implicit learning were implemented for classes with high level of proficiency as they would comprehend better and any activities conducted would be completed within the allocated time. On the other hand, for classes with intermediate or beginner levels of proficiency, most of the time it would take them some time to understand the lesson and the teacher would need to explain further on the lesson. This act would drag the learning time and therefore, the lesson of the day would not be completed. Consequently, such activities were more applicable for the good classes as their level of competence is slightly higher than other classes and hence, lead to the teacher's pedagogical belief in teaching grammar explicitly to majority of her students. This belief accords with Richards, Gallo and Renandya (2001) who stated that teachers still believe that grammar should be taught through direct method as grammar component is fundamental to language learning, although majority of the respondents stated that interactive approach is more favourable among teachers and students.

### English Syllabus

Teacher's obligation to the syllabus was identified as a prominent dilemma faced by many teachers in their teaching career. Teachers are expected to teach everything that is in the syllabus and the inability to do this will greatly affect students' learning and eventually impacted their performance in examinations. Any unfinished syllabus will greatly affect students' learning and eventually impacted their performance in examinations. The teacher in this study stated that;

*"Because in secondary school we expect the students to know and we are not expecting to teach them one by one, all the basic grammar because we need to follow the syllabus, that's the problem. We want them to know English but at the same time we need to follow the syllabus as well. If not, then the syllabus will not finish and the students will not learn, or maybe they will learn a little bit but it doesn't reach to the level whereby they can pass the exams. That's the problem with the students."*

This constant battle is causing teachers to choose the easiest way out which is teaching grammar through drilling method. Farrell and Lim (2005) discovered a similar finding which exhibited that teachers' freedom in teaching is restricted as they are constantly required to meet the syllabus demands. Thus, in relation to this study, although the teacher believes in the implicit way of teaching grammar, her obligation to teach according to the English syllabus prescribed has resulted her into choosing the explicit method of teaching grammar.

### Conclusion

Data from the study have shown that one's pedagogical belief in teaching grammar is greatly influenced by his or her own experience when learning grammar. The respondent's own experiences learning grammar during her schooling years have moulded her pedagogical beliefs in teaching grammar. In addition, the time constraints encountered and the obligation to keep up with the

English syllabus have affected her teaching methods as well. The pressure of needing to cater to students' needs together with the insufficient time to conduct implicit teaching have forced the teacher to choose explicit method of teaching grammar.

Adding to the pressure is the teacher's obligation adhering to the English syllabus that is fixed and has its own time scheme. These factors have caused the teacher to opt for the explicit teaching that would enable the teacher to comply to this demand. Data from the study also indicate that teacher in the study mostly has the intention to teach students implicitly and has attempted to conduct grammar lessons with exciting student-centered activities using attractive teaching aids but the dilemma of keeping up with the syllabus and time constraints have resulted into her abandoning such grammar lessons.

Regardless of the challenges mentioned, teachers should make efforts in providing the best learning experience for the students as the students have the rights to be taught with the most effective and meaningful teaching method. Teachers should never stop striving in finding the most suitable ways that will benefit the students, in spite of facing challenges and difficulties in implementing the lessons.

## References

- Bell, J. (2014). *Doing Your Research Project: A guide for first-time researchers*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Biggerstaff, D., & Thompson, A. R. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A qualitative methodology of choice in healthcare research. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 5(3), 214-224.
- Borg, S. (1998). Teachers' Pedagogical Systems and Grammar Teaching: A Qualitative Study. 30.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: a review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81-109.
- Borg, S. (2006). *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice*. London, UK: Continuum.
- Carter, R. & McCarthy, M. (1990). Grammar and the spoken language. *Applied Linguistics* 16, 2, 141-58.
- DeKeyser, R. (2005). What makes learning second-language grammar difficult? A review of issues. *Language Learning* 55, Supplement 1, 1-25.
- DeKeyser, R. M. (1998). Beyond focus on form: cognitive perspectives on learning and practicing second language grammar. In C. Doughty, J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp. 42-63). Cambridge University Press: Cambridge
- Ellis, R. (2006). Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL quarterly*, 40(1), 83-107.
- Ellis, R. (2010). Does explicit grammar instruction work. *NINJAL Project Review*, 1(2), 3-22.
- Farrell, T. S., & Lim, P. C. P. (2005). Conceptions of Grammar Teaching: A Case Study of Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices. *Tesl-Ej*, 9(2), n2.
- Howatt, A. P. R., & Widdowson, H. G. (2004). *A history of ELT*. Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, K. E. (1994). The emerging beliefs and instructional practices of preservice English as a second language teachers. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 10(4), 439-452.



- Krashen, S. D. (1992). Comprehensible input and some competing hypotheses. *R. Courchene, J. Glidden, J. St. John, & C. Therien (Eds.), Comprehension-Based Second Language Teaching*, 19-38.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (1991). Language-learning tasks: Teacher intention and learner interpretation. *ELT Journal*, 44(2), 98-107.
- Macrory, G. (2000) Learning to teach grammar in the modern foreign languages classroom and some implications for initial teacher education. *Research in Education*, 64, 55-82.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative Research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Nespor, J. (1987). The role of beliefs in the practice of teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 19(4), 317-328.
- Ng, E. K. J., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2003). Do Teachers' Beliefs of Grammar Teaching Match their Classroom Practices? A Singapore Case Study. In D. Deterding, Brown A & Low E L (Eds. 2003) *English in Singapore: Research on Grammar. Singapore* (pp. 128-137): McGraw Hill, 128-137.
- Richards, J. C., Gallo, P. B., & Renandya, W. A. (2001). Exploring Teachers' Beliefs and the Processes of Change. *PAC Journal*, 1,1, 41-58.
- Rutherford, W. (1987). *Second language grammar: Learning and teaching*. London: Longman.
- Schmidt, R. (1993). Consciousness, learning and interlanguage pragmatics. In G.Kasper & S. Blum-Kulka (Eds.), *Interlanguage pragmatics*. (pp. 21-42). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Seidel, J (1998) *Qualitative Data Analysis. The Ethnograph v5 Manual*, Appendix E.
- Smith, J. A., Harré, R., and Langenhove, V. L. (1995) Idiography and the case study. In Smith, J. A., Harre, R., and Van Langenhove, L., editors, *Rethinking psychology*. London: Sage.
- Spratt, M. (1999). How good are we at knowing what learners like? *System*, 27, 141-155
- Tillema, H. H. (2000). Belief change towards self-directed learning in student teachers: immersion in practice or reflection on action. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16, 575-591.